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UNCLAS BRATISLAVA 000557

SIPDIS

DEPT FOR EUR, PMAT, AND NEA

E.O. 12958: N/A

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SUBJECT: THREE SLOVAK SOLDIERS KILLED IN IRAQ

1. (U) ON JUNE 8, THREE SLOVAK SOLDIERS, TWO POLISH SOLDIERS, AND ONE LATVIAN SOLDIER WERE KILLED BY AN ACCIDENTAL EXPLOSION DURING A DEMINING OPERATION IN AL-SUVARIYA, SOUTH OF BAGHDAD. EARLY PRESS REPORTS INDICATE THAT THE ACCIDENT OCCURRED AT AN OLD MUNITIONS DEPOT. THE SLOVAKS HAVE 105 DEMINERS DEPLOYED IN IRAQ, OPERATING IN THE POLISH SECTOR.

2. (U) DEFENSE MINISTER LISKA STATED DURING A PRESS CONFERENCE THAT THE DEATHS WERE ACCIDENTAL, IMPLYING THAT HE WOULD NOT RECOMMEND THE WITHDRAWAL OF SLOVAK TROOPS. HE ADDED THAT A MILITARY COMMISSION HAS ALREADY DEPARTED SLOVAKIA TO INVESTIGATE THE ACCIDENT.

3. (U) WE ARE COORDINATING CLOSELY WITH THE PRIME MINISTER'S OFFICE AND THE MOD. AMBASSADOR WEISER HAS SENT A CONDOLENCE LETTER TO BOTH PRESIDENT SCHUSTER AND PRIME MINISTER DZURINDA, WHICH IS BEING RELEASED TO THE PRESS.

4. (U) COMMENT: THESE ARE THE FIRST SLOVAK CASUALTIES SINCE TROOPS DEPLOYED IN SUPPORT OF OPERATION IRAQI FREEDOM IN APRIL 2003. THE DEPLOYMENTS HAVE BEEN CONTENTIOUS FROM THE BEGINNING AS THE SLOVAK GOVERNMENT WAS OUT IN FRONT OF THE PUBLIC AND MANY POLITICIANS IN ITS SUPPORT OF OIF. IN RECENT WEEKS, THERE HAVE BEEN CALLS FROM THE OPPOSITION AND FROM THE CHRISTIAN DEMOCRATIC MOVEMENT (KDH) TO DISCUSS IN PARLIAMENT THE END OF THE SLOVAK MISSION IN IRAQ AS THE MANDATE IS CURRENTLY OPEN-ENDED. THESE DEATHS WILL ALMOST CERTAINLY REOPEN DEBATE IN PARLIAMENT, WHICH RECONVENES ON JUNE 22. END COMMENT.

WEISER

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